Mad in America
SCIENCE, PSYCHIATRY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Death of Joey Marino

By **Carly McCarter** - April 26, 2024

My name is Carly McCarter. I am writing about my friend who was severely polydrugged and died.

Joey and I met through Instagram. He was on the hit medical show *ER* and I had made a fan page for the show six years ago. We were messaging each other through that for four years, and when he moved back to Los Angeles he and I started talking more and more. Joey lived a clean and simple life up until he was given medication for his anxiety. Here is his story.

Joseph Salvadore Marino Jr. was known as Joey by his friends. He was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, the second oldest of four. Joey had a deep passion for theater, basketball and anything health-related. This was known by all who knew him.

Joey was a ball boy for the New Orleans Jazz in 1976 and had gotten to know Pete Maravich, aka Pistol Pete. That was Joey's first hero and he would still talk about him all the way up to when he passed away.

Joey was a personal trainer and loved to help people reach their fitness goals. He loved picking up the weights and challenging himself every single day. He studied theater and communication at the University of NO and would work out at Gold's Gym.

Joey visited Hollywood in 1984 and was determined to have a career there. In 1992 he met Anthony Edwards and was his stand-in for the movie *Delta Heat*, which landed him a permanent role as Anthony's stand-in on the hit medical show *ER* from 1997 to 2009. Joey also went on to play an orderly and a nurse on the show.

It was a career that changed his life.

Joey's friends that he spent about 12-18 hours a day with on the set always said he had anxiety about leaving the set. He would get panic attacks on the set.

Joey's dad had heart problems and that gave Joey anxiety. Joey always had some anxiety throughout his life. When Hurricane Katrina happened, with the stress from what his family and friends went through, Joey went to his doctor and was put on a beta blocker.

After ER ended, Joey continued on to *Harry's Law* with Kathy Bates and was also on *The Crazy Ones* with Robin Williams and Sarah Michelle Gellar. Once he was done in Los Angeles he had to move back to Mississippi where his mom lived. Joey never felt comfortable there.

In 2015 was when Joey started taking medication. He was first given Prozac which made him feel suicidal within days. When the Prozac wasn't helping he was put on other medications such as Propranolol, Trazodone, Klonopin, and Valium, just to name a few. His friend who worked as an advocate was with Joey through his appointments and he would agree with the doctors about the next thing Joey should take.

Joey first started noticing that his fingers would be flipping and he wasn't able to do simple things such as holding his phone without dropping it. He tried to tell his family and the doctors and they would just say that he would be fine.

Joey was also given Seroquel. As he began to realize what was happening, he started to taper off, the first time being not just on Seroquel but Valium as well.

Joey developed akathisia, tardive dyskinesia and dystonia around 2021. No one could tell him what it was. Not until he was in the emergency room in Los Angeles where a doctor acknowledged that this was medication harm and what he was experiencing were side effects.

Joey's life was disabled by these medications. He had developed a severe movement disorder and dealt with constant twisting in his hands, fingers, arms

and all over his body. He wanted to be able to work out and not have to pay for it with the severe movements and twisting. Even when it came to eating it would go against him as his dopamine was stripped from him. Whenever he ate something red like pizza, it would cause his akathisia to flare up. Sleep was a challenge for him, even though he loved to sleep. He always had to come up with a system for how to get some sleep.

In 2022 he put himself in the hospital to try to get help. From January 2022 to the end of February he was in the hospital in Mississippi until a friend picked him up and brought him back to Los Angeles to get treatment.

Joey had looked into different ways of getting better. He had gone to several different neurologists in Los Angeles and in Mississippi. Joey had tried alternative medicine, he tried getting stem cells, he tried myofascial release but it didn't do anything for him.

Joey had made videos with a friend he was staying with, to get the word out about what these medications had done to him. We tried to go to media outlets to help get the message out there.

He wanted to make a documentary about the life he was living through constant fear and pain. With his family disregarding him, and with doctors in the ER and neurologists telling him it was incurable, it didn't help Joey have tons of hope. He just wanted to get better.

In March of last year I took over Power of Attorney for Joey. He was in the hospital in March and was given additional medications along with the Klonopin he had started in January. The other two medications were Carbamazepine to help with seizures (it never did for him) and Trihexyphenidyl which was to help with the tardive dyskinesia — that as well didn't help him completely. He was able to walk a little better, and able to stand and be somewhat okay throughout the day a little better.

The doctor at the hospital wanted Joey to do a spinal tap to see if there was something else going on. It was extremely dangerous to do and he ended up not getting it done. The doctor just left him as is. Like any other place he had been,

Joey was disregarded.

After that it became difficult to get the medications he was on. At the hospitals he would go to they'd say he needs to see his primary doctor. And then the doctor would say you need to see a neurologist. There were times he was running out and was about to be cold turkey.

No one would listen to us and the concerns we had. If anything, they would just add more medications that didn't help. Joey was on almost thirty different medications between 2015 and 2024.

In October of 2023 Joey started slowly tapering off the Klonopin, Carbamazepine and Trihexyphenidyl. But as time went on, things became more difficult.

Finally he decided that it was just too difficult and he didn't want to be here and in pain anymore. Which was hard because he loved life so much. He didn't really want to leave, and his friends didn't want him to leave. But he didn't want to keep going through all of this.

In December of 2023, Joey decided to voluntarily stop eating and drinking.

He was not qualified to get a hospice nurse. After some searching we were told that once he stopped eating and drinking for a few days he would qualify for hospice.

On December 29th he started that. On January 2nd he had started to drink some and by the 5th he started to eat again. But his movements had gotten even worse than what it was in the past.

So Joey decided to resume not eating and drinking again. A few days before Joey passed he told me he was having really bad chest pains. It sounded like he was in heart failure.

Joey passed away in the early morning hours of January 14th after a difficult ten-year battle. He didn't want to live the rest of his life bedridden and no longer

able to enjoy the life that he once had and loved so much.

Joey and Carly, 2023

At the end of the day, his friends were his true family. Joey would say that all the time to me. He felt that his friends, no matter what, were there for him. That they would do all they could for him. To those who were his friends and were such a major support system for him… I honestly can't thank them enough. There were so many times I didn't know what to do, who to turn to, and so many that knew him stepped in without hesitation when I needed it the most.

Joey was friends with Christy Huff who just recently passed away as well. She was a big influence on Joey. She was trying to help him with the medication tapering. As a lot of fears were setting in I was grateful and appreciative for what she was trying to do to help.

With the many medications Joey was on, I don't know how he hung on for as long he did. He was strong, willing to try to get better.

Joey was loved by so many that had the chance to know him. He was a wonderful guy, so full of life. Even through all the pain he was in he would always

try to make people laugh, and he knew how to crack a joke at just the right time. His voice impressions were one of many things that all who knew him loved about him. Joey was an expert with voice impressions, there were almost none that he couldn't do.

There needs to be more informed consent with these medications. If Joey was more aware of the potential side effects at the very beginning, I feel he would still be here today. He always had regrets and I always told him that he was just trying to get help.

Joey is loved and deeply missed. It was a true honor to know him.

Photo by Jeff Newton

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Carly McCarter

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My name is Carly McCarter. I am from Arizona. I had met Joey Marino through my fan page for the hit medical drama ER and we became good friends. Before Joey passed, he and I had talked about what he would want done with his videos and story, and he gave me the rights to publish them. His story can be found on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.